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RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY 4539
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RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS PRIORITY 4913
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RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY 9645
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RHMFISS/COMSOCEUR VAHINGEN GE PRIORITY
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UNCLAS TEL AVIV 000973

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XXXX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

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E.O. 12958: N/A
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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Mideast

Key stories in the media:

Heralded by a Channel 2-TV story last night, the media reported that PM Ehud Olmert is being questioned by police today at his residence in Jerusalem. Although the reason for the questioning is unknown, Yediot reported that Olmert is suspected of accepting a bribe from

an American businessman with interests in Israel before he was appointed Prime Minister. Maariv and Israel Radio reported that this latest probe into Olmert's questionable past is related to the questioning of Olmert's bureau chief Shula Zaken earlier this week.

Maariv reported that the police, with approval from the Attorney General, are moving forward very quickly out of concern that given time, Olmert and Zaken would coordinate their version of events.

The Jerusalem Post quoted defense officials as saying yesterday that Amos Gilad, the head of the Defense Ministry's Diplomatic-Security Bureau, will meet Egyptian intelligence chief Omar Suleiman in Cairo in a few days to discuss the proposed cease-fire with Hamas. The newspaper reported that Israel has several reservations about the deal, including the reopening of the Rafah crossing. Israel Radio quoted Egyptian FM Ahmed Abu al-Gheit as saying in an interview with the BBC's Arabic service that the truce is not limited in time. Maariv quoted Shin Bet head Avraham Diskin at saying at the latest cabinet meeting that the GOI is holding secret meetings with Hamas behind the Shin Bet's back. The media reported that the IAF assassinated a Hamas terrorist involved in the capture of Gilad Shalit, and that IDF troops killed a civilian in another incident. Makor Rishon-Hatzofe reported that Hamas threatened to cancel the hudna [truce] following the assassination.

All media quoted IDF Chief of Staff Gabi Ashkenazi as saying yesterday that Israel took "very seriously" calls for its destruction. He was speaking on Holocaust Memorial Day at the March of the Living ceremony in the Nazi death camp Auschwitz-Birkenau in Poland.

Ha'aretz reported that donor states to the PA are expected to express concern for the suffering of Palestinians in Gaza. Israel Radio quoted Henrietta Fore, the U.S. representative to the donors conference, as saying that the U.S. administration will look favorably on a PA request for additional economic aid. Ha'aretz and The Jerusalem Post cited a report from the UN's Office of the Coordinator for Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) as saying that millions of liters of sewage have been released over the past three months into the Mediterranean Sea from Gaza. OCHA says that unless there is a consistent electrical supply, it is impossible to make regular use of the sanitation equipment in the Strip. The UN is also calling on Israel to allow the transfer of materials and spare parts that are necessary to upgrade and expand the sewage system.,

The Jerusalem Post reported that Nof Zion (View of Zion), a new neighborhood in East Jerusalem that straddles an Arab residential area with sweeping vistas of the Old City and the Temple Mount will be populated this summer. Leading media reported that Ma'aleh Adumim Mayor Benny Kashriel plans to protest lack of construction in the controversial E-1 area by spending Independence Day in a tent on a West Bank hilltop. Maariv, Israel Radio, and Ha'aretz's website quoted Secretary Rice as saying Thursday en route to London that Israel and the Palestinians must agree "once and for all" on final borders and settle the contentious matter of settlement expansion in the West Bank.

Defense Minister Ehud Barak was quoted as saying in an interview with Yediot that a solution to the Gaza problem cannot be reached without the use of force and that no option can be ruled out on Iran. He also added that 80 percent of Israelis are prepared for a peace accord with Syria even if it means painful concessions. As far as Lebanon, Barak opined that the presence of 40,000 missiles in the hands of Hizbullah is a threat to the entire territory of Israel.

Yediot (Nahum Barnea) reported that an associate of Vice President Dick Cheney may have been behind the leak to reporters of the video on Israel's attack of the alleged Syrian nuclear reactor. Barnea noted that Cheney is opposed to Secretary Rice's agreement with North Korea.

Makor Rishon-Hatzofe reported that Ehud Barak has instructed the IDF to remove the roadblock between Ramallah and the settlement of Beit-El.

The Jerusalem Post quoted Israel's Ambassador to the UN in Geneva as saying yesterday that he was relieved that South Africa had withdrawn its offer to host next year's "Durban II" event. The

newspaper quoted a Foreign Ministry source as saying that Israel was still worried about the racism parley. The Jerusalem Post quoted the Jerusalem-based watchdog NGO Monitor as saying in a report issued this week that Human Rights Watch has systematically condemned Israel for "collective punishment" in Gaza, undermining its stated agenda of promoting human rights universally.

The Jerusalem Post quoted PA officials as saying that over 100,000 Palestinians living in Lebanon are expected to march toward the border with Israel on May 14 in the context of the PA's plan to mark the 60th anniversary of the establishment of Israel. Leading media reported that the PA leadership has announced that it would boycott any world leader who arrived in Israel to participate in the anniversary celebrations. Leading media reported that yesterday an Israeli-Arab judge from the Nazareth District Court ruled in favor of allowing a Nakba (Catastrophe) Day parade planned by the northern branch of Israel's Islamic Movement in the Israeli-Arab community of Kafr Kana. Right-wing politicians condemned the ruling.

Major media reported that this week the Great Rabbinical Court in Jerusalem revoked the conversion to Judaism of a woman who does not observe the principles of Judaism (neither do many converts, NB). The ruling might retroactively reverse the status of many converts, who will effectively no longer be able to marry.

Israel Radio reported that Yuval Rabin, the late PM Yitzhak Rabin's son, may run for Tel Aviv mayorship.

Yediot reported that on the occasion of Israel's 60th anniversary California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger will allow Israeli inmates in his state to serve the remainder of their prison terms in Israel.

Yediot reported that the American Embassy in Tel Aviv has doubled the fee to schedule a visa appointment. The newspaper quoted the embassy as saying that the upgrading of the Internet service and expenses related to the maintenance of the system are the causes of the hike, and that the embassy is currently working with Israel Post (the Post Office) to implement a payment system which would allow MRV fees to be paid at the prevailing exchange rate instead of being fixed far in advance.

Mideast:

Summary:

Military correspondent Yaakov Katz wrote on page one of the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "What is likely to happen is that Israel will 'silently' accept the [truce] offer.... And Israel would have a tough time explaining its policies abroad if it continues firing in Gaza when Hamas and other factions have all announced their readiness to lay down their weapons."

Senior op-ed writer Akiva Eldar commented from Aqaba in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "The talk of an alleged breakthrough in the attempts to renew negotiations between Jerusalem and Damascus are nothing more than camouflage for a major setback in Israel's talks with the Palestinians."

The Jerusalem Post editorialized: "With so much attention focused on the Hamas threat and Independence Day security concerns, and given the degree to which Israel was taken by surprise in summer 2006, all we're urging is: Keep an eye on southern Lebanon."

Yad Vashem Chairman Avner Shalev wrote in Ha'aretz: "The Nazis' goal was to murder every single Jewish person in Europe, and ultimately in the world.... In contrast, the current situation in the Middle East is a classic one of adversaries."

Block Quotes:

1I. "Edging toward 'silent acceptance' of a Truce"

Military correspondent Yaakov Katz wrote on page one of the

conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (5/2): "One of Israel's greatest concerns with a truce is the possibility that Hamas will continue smuggling weapons into Gaza and build up its military infrastructure at an unprecedented rate. It will be up to Egypt to prevent this. In the end what is likely to happen is that Israel will 'silently' accept the offer.... Israel also has to be concerned about its image abroad and what the international community will say if it respects the cease-fire. The U.S., The [Jerusalem] Post has reported, is pressuring Jerusalem to wrap up the deal ahead of President George W. Bush's visit to Israel in two weeks. And Israel would have a tough time explaining its policies abroad if it continues firing in Gaza when Hamas and other factions have all announced their readiness to lay down their weapons."

II. "The Syrian-Palestinian Lie"

Senior op-ed writer Akiva Eldar commented from Aqaba in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (5/2): "Olmert's attempt to reopen the Syrian channel at the expense of the talks with the Palestinians will not only accomplish nothing on either front, with the long arms of Iran and Al-Qaida (a new periodical the organization published in Gaza received the blessing of Ayman Al-Zawahiri), reaching every corner of the region, such a move might unsettle even the fragile peace with Jordan and Egypt and bury the Arab peace initiative.... Olmert is part of a big charade being held for the upcoming visit by President Bush, patron of the Annapolis declaration: 'an effort to reach an agreement by the end of 2008.' The talk of an alleged breakthrough in the attempts to renew negotiations between Jerusalem and Damascus are nothing more than camouflage for a major setback in Israel's talks with the Palestinians.... When the negotiations with the Palestinians come to a noisy end, and Hamas, having obtained calm in Gaza, drives the remnants out of the Muqata ... Syria will also pop loudly. The supposed negotiations in two simultaneous channels will become a case of double Israeli recalcitrance. Assad will wave around his fruitless wooing of Olmert and the violation of the Annapolis declaration. He will call for the implementation of the Arab Leagues' Damascus declaration from March, he will claim that the peace initiative with Israel must be reexamined, and he will demand that Egypt and Jordan adhere to the standard of making normalization with the Jewish state conditional on its withdrawal to the June 4, 1967 borders. That is the danger of which King Abdullah spoke to Bush. That is why he invited Olmert to Amman."

III. "An Eye on the North"

The Jerusalem Post editorialized (5/2): "Something odd may be going on in southern Lebanon, and the Israeli security apparatus needs to be watching.... Of course, UN Security Council Resolution 1701 mandates no military activity in southern Lebanon save for the 10,000 soldiers of the Lebanese Army deployed there, supported by 13,000 UNIFIL troops and 1,500 personnel of the UNIFIL Maritime Task Force stationed along the coast.... In practice, Hizbullah shamelessly violates the cease-fire.... Hizbullah watcher Guy Bechor, writing on [the Hebrew-language site] www.gplanet.co.il, does not foresee a Hizbullah assault in the near term. But he doesn't discount the prospect of a large-scale surprise attack down the line. He warns that hundreds of guerrillas could burst through the entire length of the border, seize territory, and take hundreds of hostages. Nasrallah could then claim to be the first Arab leader to have successfully invaded 'Palestine' since 1948, thus solidifying Hizbullah's hold on the Arab imagination. With so much attention focused on the Hamas threat and Independence Day security concerns, and given the degree to which Israel was taken by surprise in summer 2006, all we're urging is: Keep an eye on southern Lebanon."

IV. "If Everything Is Genocide..."

Yad Vashem Chairman Avner Shalev wrote in Ha'aretz (5/2): "Recently, yet another Hamas spokesperson compared the situation in Gaza to events during the Holocaust. Coming from an official who represents an organization that unabashedly declares its commitment to terrorism and the destruction of Israel, this is in itself not surprising.... Language has power. The words we choose to use carry weight, and are meaningful. If we elect to label every event 'genocide,' or equate every event with the Holocaust, then we detract from the real meaning of those words and reduce their

ability to represent true horror. Subsequently, when faced with a real incident of genocidal murder, people will be less likely to be moved to act. If everything is genocide, nothing is genocide..... The Nazis' goal was to murder every single Jewish person in Europe, and ultimately in the world.... In contrast, the current situation in the Middle East is a classic one of adversaries. The conflict between the Palestinians and Israel is fundamentally about land and sovereignty, with tangible issues and a long, convoluted history. It is legitimate to criticize both sides in this conflict. But to employ outright lies in place of legitimate criticism undermines any possibility of building understanding. Despite assertions to the contrary, a lie, no matter how big and how often it is told, does not become truth.... Doing this to the Holocaust, arguably one of the most significant and horrific events of modern history, dishonors the victims, and trivializes the events themselves."

MORENO